

Peace Journalism in the Reportage of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: Analysis of Leadership and Punch Newspapers

by

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Abstract

This study analyses how some of Nigeria's leading national dailies – *Leadership* and *Punch* newspapers reported the Boko Haram terrorism. The goal is to identify possible content evidences of peace journalism awareness and application in the Nigerian media terrain. Many studies have shown that newspapers are capable of igniting or mitigating conflicts depending on the techniques they adopt in reporting it. In view of this, there is a changing interest towards peace journalism, whereby the media is expected to be giving voice to all parties, focus on invisible effects of conflicts, and be truth oriented, people oriented as well as solution-driven. The objectives are to identify the indicators of peace journalism in the newspapers' reportage of Boko Haram; to determine the occurrence of war journalism in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram and to compare the prominence given to peace and war indicators. The study adopts content analysis and framing theory. Findings reveal that *Leadership* and *Punch* newspapers largely reflected war journalism approach compared to peace journalism approach in the reportage of the Boko Haram terrorism. The predominant indicators identified strongly suggest that these leading newspapers are not familiar with peace journalism. This leads the study to recommend that the media organizations should pay increased attention to journalists' training on conflict reporting, as such will enhance the overall contribution of mass media to the course of peace in the country.

Key words: *Peace Journalism, Newspapers, Boko Haram, Reportage, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Many research suggest that media is capable of inflaming or mitigating conflicts depending on the way they report it (Ozohu, 2013; Nacos, 2007; Hoffman, 2006; McQuail 1987; Wilkinson, 2000). Knowing the importance of peace for the citizens, studies on Boko Haram have attracted writers' attention whose various works have been of help to policy makers both governmental and nongovernmental to strategize plans towards curbing the menace. Notwithstanding the wide spread of terrorists' activities in many parts of the world, to Nigerians, Boko Haram is a maiden scourge both in form and scope.

There exist strong debates among scholars about how media can incite people towards violence. Record had shown that Adolf Hitler used media to create hatred for Jews during the Second World War (Jimoh and Danladi, 2012). Similarly, Ozohu-Suleiman (2013) has noted that the concerns that follow media's antisocial record of inciting and encouraging conflicts did not end with only suppositional prescription of a shift to peace journalism correspondence. Researchers and experienced journalists have spent time suggesting how the media might shift from war to peace correspondence in covering conflicts. Key contributors in this regard include Galtung (1998), McGoldrick and Lynch (2000), Howard (2003), Kempt (2003), El-Nawawy and Powers (2008).

Ibrahim (2012) has noted that Nigeria as a country has suffered a lot from numerous ethno-religious crisis since independence. Most times the coverage of such crises by the Nigerian press has been described as partisan and further promotes the polarization of the country along regional lines as well as unethical reporting. However, the portrayal of Boko Haram is not free from this allegation that the southern newspapers may pay less attention to peace-driven journalism while the northern newspapers may prioritize peace journalism. This may be dependent on their clients' vulnerability to the current Boko Haram terrorism.

A study conducted in 2014 suggests further studies on newspaper reportage of terrorism and its influence on people perception about the whole issue of terrorism in Nigeria (Idowu, 2014). In the same vein, Ozohu-Suleiman (2013) has noted that the influence of mass media in national and international security policies is growing thus necessitating studies on how the media respond to conflict situations. Cognizant of these facts, the study raised the following research

questions: In the effort of examining the adoption of war approaches in the newspapers' reportage of Boko Haram; the study questions:

RQ 1: What are the indicators of war journalism in the newspapers' reportage of Boko Haram?

To determine the usage of peace approaches in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram, the study questions:

RQ 2: What are the indicators of peace journalism in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram?

To compare the prominence of peace and war approaches in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram, the study questions:

RQ 3: What comparison exists between war and peace journalism indicators in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram?

Peace Journalism

Peace journalism understands itself as "a normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals, and audiences towards war and peace" (Shinar, 2007:2). Peace Journalism is rooted in the belief that the news media in many societies can be a powerful force to reduce the causes of conflict. It is seen as a force to enable a conflict-stressed society to better pursue conflict resolution (Howard, 2009).

The media can contribute to a wider dialogue among disparate parts of the community in conflict, through improved reporting. It can explore and provide information about opportunities for resolution. And at the same time the media must maintain its essential standards of accuracy, fairness and balance, and responsible conduct (Howard, 2009). Though, concerns have been raised that peace journalism "could compromise the integrity of journalists and confuse their role as neutral disseminators of facts" (Loyn, 2003). This concern is almost justified because some supporters of peace journalism seem all too inclined to underrate values like objectivity, neutrality and detachment (e.g., Mc Goldrick, 2006; Peleg, 2007).

According to Lynch & McGoldrick (2005) cited in McGoldrick (2006:4), "peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories to report, and how to report them". Peace Journalism is aimed at establishing peace-making processes with the intent of having peaceful society. It reflects a modernization of the original values of the news media. The media can be helpful in peace moves by training its journalists to understand conflict and the media's role in it. The journalists can strengthen their reporting to avoid stereotypes and narrow perspectives on the causes and process of conflict (Howard, 2009).

Seow and Maslog (2005) have noted that the coverage of conflict is a dilemma that is grounded in the notion of conflict as a news value. As a result, conflict reporting is often sensational and a mere device to boost circulation and ratings. Norwegian Professor of Peace Studies, Johan Galtung first proposed peace journalism as a self-conscious, working concept for journalists covering wars and conflicts (Galtung, 1998). He viewed peace journalism and war journalism as two competing frames in the coverage of a conflict. He memorably likened war journalism to sports journalism, which characteristically sees its object in terms of a zero-sum game where winning is all. A better model, he argued, would be health journalism. Here the plight of a patient with cancer, for example, would be described, the causes as well as the range of possible remedies and future preventative measures. This model would prove more productive in the context of conflict reporting than focusing on violence, negative events and siding with a particular protagonist.

War journalism is oriented in war/violence, propaganda, elites, and victory. In addition, war journalism plays up conflict as an arena where participants are grouped starkly into two opposing sides (them vs. us) in a zero-sum game and focuses on visible effects of war (casualties and damage to property). In contrast, peace journalism is a broader, fairer and more accurate way for portrayal of stories, drawing on the insights of conflict analysis and transformation. Like public journalism and development journalism, peace journalism is grounded in communication philosophy – namely the commitment to the idea of civic participation, the understanding of social justice as a moral imperative, and the view that the value and sacredness of the individual are realised only in and through communities (Galtung, 1998).

By taking an advocacy, interpretative approach, the peace journalist concentrates on stories that highlight peace initiatives; tone down ethnic and religious differences, prevents further conflict,

focuses on the structure of society; and promotes conflict resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation by giving voice to all parties (not only two opposing sides), and creates empathy and understanding. Other peace journalism approaches include taking a preventive advocacy stance—for example, editorials and columns urging reconciliation and focusing on common ground rather than on vengeance, retaliation, and differences—and emphasising the invisible effects of violence (e.g. emotional trauma and damage to social structure). Through careful, consistent, and conscientious application of peace journalism practices, the peace journalist hopes to create a setting in which the causes of and possible solutions to the conflict become transparent (Yang Lai Fong, 2009).

Relationship between Terrorism and the Press

Press has been performing a shaping role through their reports of terrorism, in her study of the CBS coverage of 1979 -1980 Iranian hostage crisis, Palmerton (1988) cited in Slocum (2005:135) put forward a premise that “the meaning of terrorism is shaped in large part by the major vehicle we use to gain our primary information about events occurring outside our immediate circle of experience: the news media” therefore hinting that the peoples’ definition of terrorism is largely dependent on media narrations.

Some authors have conceded that the real issue is not so much the relationship between terrorism and the media which is widely acknowledged to exist, but whether such relationship actually affects public opinion and government decision making (Hoffman, 2006). Consequently, assuming that media representations of terrorism are largely the source for peoples’ information about terrorism (Kowoll, 2012), theorists have also raised mocking questions about the dramatic narration and manners in which media report terrorist acts (Azeez, 2010).

There is a general consensus among observers of Western media that on September 11, 2001, the conventional rules of newsgathering and reportage ceased to apply (McNair, 2007). According to Zellizer and Allan (2002) 9/11 terrorist attack on America shook to their foundation the familiar notions of what it means to be a journalist, how best to practice journalism, and what different publics can reasonably expect of journalists in the name of democracy. Azeez (2010) ascribed the reason for this to predicament associated with terrorism reporting unlike any other tea, bread, and butter news event.

Nacos (2007) observes that media often report terrorism in a tradition of ‘thoughtless’ and ‘stereotypical’ pattern, and they also adopt a ‘follow-the-leader pattern’ which she described as the tendency of the news media to adopt the language of the leading government officials in their social construction of terrorism. Some scholars have also picked on the choice of words used by media in reporting terrorism. Within the framework that the language adopted in reporting terrorism can affect people’s perception of terrorism and may have important consequences for public policy support concerning actions and reactions in response to violence (Dunne, Moore & Nosek, 2005).

Azeez (2010) states that media tend to use evaluative language in defining or labeling terrorist for the purpose of priming and constructing a version of reality. Such choices of words are likely to imprint certain relative long-term impression about certain social grouping on the mind of the people. From this perspective:

The media ought to know that words have power....Still (partly through the use of words), the press has convinced both itself and the public that only ‘Muslim’ are ‘terrorist’. Strangely, there are no ‘Christian’ or ‘Jewish’ terrorist! The Catholic Irish republican Army which has carried out attacks against Irish and English Protestants was never called an organization of ‘Christian Terrorist’ nor is the protestants Ulster defence Association so termed, though it too carried out acts of terror against Catholics (Hussain & Rosenbaum, 2004:178).

Stereotyping, sensationalism (Cohen-Almagor, 2005) and demonization of religion, ethnic groups, or geographical entity are also visible in media reporting of terrorism (Hussain & Rosenbaum, 2004; Akter, 2010; Dakrouby, 2008) One grand narrative through which terrorism is reported, is what Schmid and de Graaf (1982) have called a dramaturgical paradigm consisting of good and bad.

This one sided narrative of media in reporting Terrorism has therefore veiled their role as the arena where various angles of public issues are played out in order to stimulate independent thoughts and actions from the public. Using the utilitarian value of American media coverage of 9/11 attack, Norris (2003:295) asked the following questions: “did the public find information that facilitate the cognitive construction of judgment necessary to understand events? Did news frame build or disrupt bonds of national, social and political trust?

Theoretical Approach

The study is anchored to media framing theory. There is a considerable debate in scholarly circles about the differences between attribute agenda setting and framing theories. The idea that framing and frames are primary means through which people make sense of a complicated world got its modern impetus from two scholars, Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman (Entman, Matthes & Pellicano, 2009). Framing has been defined as “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences” (de Vreese, 2001).

Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. Framing is often traced back to roots in both psychology and sociology (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The psychological origin of Framing lies in experimental work by Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984), for which Kahneman received the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics (Kahneman, 2003).

To frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993). However, problem definitions are the core objectives of this study. According to Norris, Kern and Just (2003) the idea of ‘news frames’ refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context, they explain further “News frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. The essence of framing is selection, to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events.

Therefore, by virtue of emphasizing some elements of some issues above others, a frame provides a way to understand an event or issue. In this respect, the framing and presentation of events and news in the mass media can thus systematically affect how recipients of news come to understand these events (Price, Tewksbury & Power, 1995). Norris, Kern & Just (2003) point out that the conventional news frame in any society is expected to play a central role in shaping public reactions especially where there is a broad consensus creating a shared ‘one-sided’

interpretation among most leaders and who share a common national culture and identity. Framing theory has a good explanatory power as to how media narratives of issues will influence people's understanding and opinion on those issues.

Method

The study adopts content analysis method; the reason for the choice of this method is to get relevant data from the newspapers that will answer the research questions raised for the study. It is through content analysis method that the frequencies of approaches to peace and war journalism can be coded. Furthermore, all the editions of the years 2013-2014 by *Leadership* and *Punch* newspapers formed the population of the study. The choice of the Newspapers is based on the data the researcher is set out to examine which has to do with the newspapers' reportage of the Boko Haram terrorists.

The newspapers to be analyzed were purposively sampled that is the class of non- probability sampling because of its wide readership in the country. While the choice of the editions were systematically sampled where the nth element is the seventh edition after skipping the sixth edition, excluding weekend's editions. 164 editions across the newspapers were sampled, 82 from each. A coding sheet was designed by the researcher to collect the data for analysis. The coding sheet contained all the variables relevant to the research questions. The categories are the peace and war approaches and articles constitute the units of analysis. Simple descriptive statistics is adopted where Frequencies and percentages are used in displaying issues in tables.

Results

The data are presented, analysed and interpreted using frequency and simple percentage of each of the approaches employed by the sampled newspapers on Boko Haram terrorists. A table is used to group the variables set to examine the study.

Table 1: Approaches that are Inconsistent with Peace journalism

Indicators	Leadership		Punch	
Reactive	45	14.4%	42	13.8%
Visible effect of war	69	22.1%	70	23.0%
Elite-oriented	44	14.1%	42	13.8%
Zero-sum oriented	30	9.6%	29	9.5%

Two-party oriented	26	8.3%	22	7.2%
Differences oriented	22	7.1%	26	8.5%
Partisan	76	24.4%	74	24.3%
Total/Percentage	312	100.0%	305	100.0%

Going by the total frequency of indicators that are inconsistent with peace journalism, Leadership has n=312, followed by Punch with n=305. However, the analysis showed that Leadership newspaper is using war journalism excessively in their report more than Punch newspaper. With the outrage in the percentages and the frequencies visible in the war journalism which by far outnumbered the peace journalism, the frames have a lot of implications on peace journalism as it will further escalate the ongoing war between the terrorists and the government.

Table 2: Approaches that are Consistent with Peace journalism

Indicators	Leadership		Punch	
Proactive	17	15.0%	13	11.3%
Invisible effect of war	3	2.7%	7	6.1%
People oriented	20	17.7%	19	16.5%
Agreement oriented	15	13.3%	17	14.8%
Win-win oriented	25	22.1%	19	16.5%
Multi-party oriented	24	21.2%	28	24.3%
Non partisan	9	8.0%	12	10.4%
Total/Percentage	113	100.0%	115	100.0%

Going by the total frequency of Peace journalism indicators, Punch has n=115, followed by Leadership with n=113. The result showed that Punch newspaper was more conflict sensitive than Leadership newspaper either because of their expertise in peace journalism or negligence to the area by the Leadership news.

Discussion

R:Q 1: What are the indicators of war journalism in the newspapers' reportage of Boko Haram?

In answering the first research question, which asks how war approaches are portrayed in the newspapers' reportage of Boko Haram, the researcher used the data from table 1, where it was observed that Leadership newspaper used war approaches more than Punch newspaper, the possible factor can be resulted from its expertise in packaging report with a tilt to peace.

Notwithstanding the location of the Punch newspaper i.e. Lagos where the activities of the Boko Haram are rare, does not make it reluctant in adopting peace strategies to bring the terrorism to an end. It can be related also to lack of knowledge of the peace journalism from the side of Leadership newspaper. Because, its location i.e. Abuja where most of the immediate communities are vulnerable to the activities of Boko Haram could have gingered it off to be committed than a southern newspaper.

Knowing that the media has a role of framing issues in their report, scholars have been cautioning them on the way issues should be reported and interpreted to the consumption of the public. As a result, in her study of the CBS coverage of 1979 -1980 Iranian hostage crisis, Palmerton (1988) cited in Slocum (2005; 135) put forward a premise that “the meaning of terrorism is shaped in large part by the major vehicle we used to gain our primary information about events occurring outside our immediate circle of experience: the news media” therefore hinting that the peoples’ definition of terrorism is largely dependent on media narrations. However, it is the report of the media that can make or mar the positive thinking of the people.

According to Norris, Kern & Just (2003) the idea of ‘news frames’ refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context, they explain further “News frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting developments. The essence of *framing* is selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events”

To Hermann & Hermann (1998) media in reporting terrorism, not only dispatch information but, like good drama critics, interpret it as well. They skew what they give by deciding which events to report and which to ignore, intentionally or unintentionally expressing approval or disapproval to create an atmosphere of public support, apathy, or irritation”. In this manner, as long as terrorists are primarily interested in how the audience; the national and foreign publics; and decision-makers in a government reacts to their acts, terrorists’ aims can never be achieved without the media.

In the literature reviewed, emphasis has been made on the power of the media in instigating or suppressing any violence. According to Ozohu-Suleiman, (2013:17) “accelerating or impeding

security, and shaping or refining opinions are similar ways of acknowledging that the mass media can serve as a powerful tool for inflaming disagreement and diffusing conflicts or facilitating peace".

RQ 2: What are the Indicators of Peace Journalism in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram?

Frames of peace journalism were identified in table 2, using the classification of war and peace journalism by Galtung (1998). Peace journalism which combines journalism with peace as an external aim understands itself as "a normative mode of responsible and conscientious media coverage of conflict that aims at contributing to peacemaking, peacekeeping, and changing the attitudes of media owners, advertisers, professionals, and audiences towards war and peace" (Shinar, 2007:2).

Going by the total frequency of Peace journalism indicators, Punch has n=115, followed by Leadership with n=113. The analysis showed that Punch newspaper is more conflict sensitive than Leadership newspaper. Though, the overall frequencies of peace indicators are discouraging here, because they are not well adopted by the newspapers thereby having implication on peace journalism.

In the words of Mc Goldrick (2006) "avoid assessing the merits of a violent action or policy of violence in terms of its visible effect only. Instead try to find ways of reporting on the invisible effects, e.g., the long term consequences of psychological damage and trauma, perhaps increasing the likelihood that those affected will be violent in the future, either against other people or, as a group, against other groups or other country".

With the arguments on ground on the acceptability of peace journalism, some newspapers may not take it a responsibility to adopt the strategies suggested by peace journalism scholars. Peace journalism arouses concern that peace journalism "could compromise the integrity of journalists and confuse their role as neutral disseminators of facts" (Loyn, 2003). This concern is all the more justified because some supporters of peace journalism seem all too inclined to underrate values like objectivity, neutrality and detachment (e.g., Mc Goldrick, 2006; Peleg, 2007). However, this may be the reason why peace journalism is not widely adopted.

RQ 3: How do the levels of prominence between war and peace journalism indicators compare in the newspapers' report of Boko Haram?

McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) cited in Ozohu-Suleiman (2013) provided a 17-point practical guide on what a journalist should avoid in order to report conflict in the interest of peace which six of them were captured in this study, among was to avoid portraying a conflict as consisting of only two parties contesting one goal. The logical outcome is for one to win and the other to lose. Instead, a peace journalist will disaggregate the two parties into many smaller groups, pursuing many goals, opening up more potential for a range of outcome.

Going by the indicators of peace approaches as encouraged by the peace journalism scholars. Punch is more conflict sensitive than Leadership newspaper and this may be attributed to the policy of their industries in recognizing peace journalism as a good tool to promote peace or the impact of their locations.

Framing theory has relevance with the findings in that all the frames of peace and war indicators which were analyzed are the framing of the two sampled newspapers. Framing is based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences. To frame is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993).

Going by the frames of both war and peace journalism, the frames of war received more prominence than peace journalism. This indicates that both Punch and Leadership have no deeper knowledge of peace journalism. In another way, their industries' policy may be in conflict with peace journalism in their effort to have their reports devoid of biases and subjectivity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that despite the arguments surrounding the adoption of peace journalism as a way of promoting peace by the media, some Nigerian newspapers adopt it, while others ignore it. This is based on the acceptance or rejection of peace journalism by the industry a journalist is working with. Professionalism has it that a journalist should report objectively, thereby detaching

personal ideas in their report regardless of the benefit it renders to the society. Some are of the view that the journalists are promoters of peace, therefore, can compromise objectivity which according to some is only theoretical.

It also concludes that some journalists working with the newspaper houses lack training in knowing how to adopt peace journalism in their reportage. This is because workshops for journalists are scarcely conducted to address some of the pressing issues in Nigeria. Again, some newspapers have negligence to the ongoing menace for being safely pursuing their activities in the areas that are not prone to Boko Haram attacks.

The study recommends that workshops should be frequently organized by the newspaper houses to be addressing issues of public concern. It also recommends that regardless of the professionalism, peace-driven approaches to reporting issues should be the priority of Nigerian journalists.

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